

Vegetable of the Month

Chili Peppers

Hot peppers (chilies) are often used to spice up dishes, and they are especially popular in ethnic cuisine including Mexican, Indian, Thai, Vietnamese, Arab and Spanish cooking. Chilies are an excellent source of vitamin C if you can withstand their powerful bite.



Photo courtesy of wegmans.com

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size (46g)

Servings Per Container

Amount Per Serving

Calories 10 **Calories from Fat** 0

% Daily Value*

Total Fat 0g **0%**

Saturated Fat 0g **0%**

Cholesterol 0mg **0%**

Sodium 5mg **0%**

Total Carbohydrate 2g **1%**

Dietary Fiber 2g **8%**

Sugars 1g

Protein 1g

Vitamin A 4% • Vitamin C 60%

Calcium 0% • Iron 2%

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

		Calories	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less Than	65g	80g	
Saturated Fat	Less Than	20g	25g	
Cholesterol	Less Than	300mg	300 mg	
Sodium	Less Than	2,400mg	2,400mg	
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g	
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g	

Calories per gram:

Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

Contrary to popular belief, the hottest part of the chili pepper is not the seeds but where the seed attaches to the white membrane inside the pepper. This area has the highest concentration of capsaicinoids. Capsaicinoids are flavorless, odorless substances that act on pain receptors in the mouth and throat. Capsaicin is the primary capsaicinoid. Capsaicinoids can be found throughout the flesh of chili peppers though their concentration varies in different areas so that one part of a pepper may be hot and another part of the same pepper quite mild.

The seeds are often hot because they are in such close contact with the white membrane.

There are several varieties of chili peppers (see box below) and each differs in flavor and heat intensity. Even within each variety, there may differences in how "hot" each particular chili is. Typically, larger chilies are more mild because they contain less seeds and white membrane in proportion to their size. Most varieties can be found dried, canned or fresh.

Varieties of Chili Peppers:

Anaheim (California Green Chile or Long Green Chile): One of the most commonly used varieties in the United States, especially in stuffed chiles. This chili is long, slender and lobed, green or red in color and mildly hot. They can be eaten when green or in when they are their mature red color.

Ancho: Dried or fresh poblano pepper. Dried anchos are flat, wrinkled and heart shaped. They range in color from very dark red to almost black. Anchos are mild to moderately hot and often soaked and ground for use in sauces.

Cascabel: Green or red, small and round, moderately hot and typically available dried. When dried, their skin turns a translucent red-brown color and their seeds rattle inside.

Cayenne (Long Hots): Red when fully mature, long (6 to 10 inches), thin and straight or curled at the tips. Very hot. Cayenne can be found dried and ground into a powder that is seen as generic "red pepper" in the spice aisle.

Cherry: Round and red like a cherry. Sold fresh or pickled in jars, these peppers range from mild to moderately hot.

Habanero (Scotch Bonnet): Typically yellow-orange but they can be green, red or orange. These peppers are lantern shaped and typically about 2 inches long. The hottest pepper grown commercially; intense fiery flavor; a unique floral flavor and an extremely intense heat that affects the nasal passages.

Hungarian: These peppers start out yellow and ripen to orange or red; they are moderately hot.

Jalapeño: Most often green when mature but sometimes red, these peppers are about 2 inches in length with cracks around their stems. They are very hot, with an immediate bite. Jalapeños are sold canned, sliced, and pickled and are added to many products during processing including sausage, cheese, and jelly.

Poblano: Ancho peppers that are green. Poblano peppers look like small bell peppers and are mild to hot in taste. They are often roasted and peeled prior to being used in soups, sauces, casseroles or even stuffed with meat and cheese for a dish called *chilies rellenos*.

Serrano: Sold red or mature green and about 1 to 4 inches in length. Moderate to very hot with an intense bite. Serrano chilis are often used in Thai cooking and they are also quite popular in Mexico and the southwestern United States.

Anaheim



Ancho



Cascabel



Cayenne



Cherry



Habanero



Hungarian



Jalapeño



Poblano



Serrano



Availability, Selection, and Storage

Chili peppers are available year round and in the U.S. they are grown in California, New Mexico and Texas. When selecting chilies, look for firm, glossy chilies with taut, unwrinkled skin and fresh green stems. Dried hot peppers should be glossy yet unbroken.

Chilies should be stored unwashed and wrapped in paper towels in the refrigerator for up to three weeks. Dried chilies should be stored in airtight containers at room temperature for a maximum of four months. To keep dried chilies for more than four months, store them in the refrigerator.

Preparation

It is very important not to touch your nose, eyes or mouth after handling or eating hot peppers. If you do, flush with water immediately. The capsaicin in the peppers can be extremely painful to your eyes and can even burn or irritate your skin (especially if you have cuts on your hands).

If possible, wear thin rubber gloves while preparing chili peppers. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water when done working with chilies. If the bite is too strong when you eat a chili, chew on bread or another starchy food; water only makes the bite worse as it spreads it.

To decrease the heat intensity of chilies, wash them, cut them open and remove the seeds and veins. Also, soaking cut up chilies in salt water for at least an hour will help cool them off.

To add a mild pepper flavor to your dish, poke holes in the chili of your choice with a toothpick (or cut slits in it) and add it to a food that is already cooking. When cooking is complete, remove the chili from the dish.

Chilies can also be roasted whole over a gas stove, broiler, or on a grill. Use a cooking fork to hold each pepper over flame. Turn frequently until the chili's skin is blackened. After cooking is complete, place chilies in a paper or plastic bag for 15 minutes. Scrape off skin, cut off stem and pull out core. Scrape any remaining seeds.

Preparing dried hot peppers

Use a damp cloth to wipe peppers. Grind chilies in a food processor for use as chili powder. To soften their texture and make their flavor more mild, soak chili peppers in water prior to using.

Make Chili Peppers part of your 5 to 9 A Day Plan!

- Cut up and add to pizza as a topping!
- Dice and add to your favorite salsa recipe or any store bought salsa.
- Chop finely and add to salads.
- Serve as a garnish next to a meal and eat the garnish!
- Add to stews and soups for a stronger flavor
- Sprinkle chopped hot peppers into meat loaf, tomato sauce or macaroni and cheese
- Cook in corn bread for a zesty jalapeño corn bread



Recipes

Makes 4 servings

Source: Wegmans

Energy Density = 0.67

- 1 medium (about 1/2 lb) green pepper

4 bananas, diced fine (about 2 cups)

1/2 Tbsp mint leaves, chopped fine

3 Tbsp lime juice (about 2 limes)

2 Tbsp brown sugar

1 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil

2 jalapeno peppers, seeded, diced fine (wear gloves)

1 medium (about 1/2 lb) red sweet pepper, cored, seeded, diced fine

Clean grill with wire brush; using soft cloth, coat grill lightly with vegetable oil.

Grill whole green pepper to char all sides, about 15 minutes. Remove from

grill; place in bowl. Cover with plastic wrap; let rest 5 minutes. Remove from

bowl; peel, core, seed, and dice.

Combine all ingredients in medium bowl. Relish can be served with hot dogs,

Nutritional analysis per serving: calories 116, protein 2g, fat 4g, percent

calories from fat 30%, cholesterol 0mg, carbohydrates 21g, fiber 2g, sodium

10mg

Salsa Fresca

Makes 2 servings

Each serving equals one 5 A Day servings

Source: Wegmans

Energy Density = 0.30

1 large (about 1/2 lb) ripe tomato, cored and chopped

1/4 small (about 1/2 cup) sweet onion, peeled and chopped

1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and minced

1 large clove garlic, peeled and minced

Combine all ingredients in medium bowl; salt to taste. Serve with tortilla chips.

Option: Add 2 Tbsp of chopped cilantro if desired.

Nutritional analysis per serving: calories 48, protein 1g, fat 0g, percent calories from fat 9%, cholesterol 0mg, carbohydrates 10g, fiber 1g, sodium 5mg

Chunky Style Florida Chili

Makes 8 servings

Each serving equals three 5 A Day servings

Source: Wegmans

Energy Density = 0.59

2 lbs extra lean ground beef
1 lb hot lean Italian sausage
1 1/2 cups onion (diced large)
1 1/2 cups green pepper (diced large)
1 cup celery (diced large)
1 Tbsp jalapeno pepper (minced)
2 Tbsp garlic (minced)
3 Tbsp chili powder
1 Tbsp cumin
1 Tbsp dried oregano
1 tsp cayenne pepper
6 ozs low sodium tomato paste
4 cups salt-free beef stock
3 cups fresh tomatoes (diced large)
15 ozs low sodium tomato sauce
2 cups zucchini (diced large)
2 cups yellow squash (diced large)
1 1/2 cups low sodium dark red kidney beans (canned)
1 1/2 cups low sodium black beans (canned)
salt and black pepper to taste

This meal can be cooked in a crock pot (add all ingredients and cook for on low for 1 hour or longer).

Brown ground beef and sausage in a large pot, remove grease and add onions, peppers, celery, jalapeno, and garlic. Saute over a medium heat for about 5 minutes. Add dry spices and continue to cook for 2-3 more minutes.

Add tomato paste, beef stock, tomato sauce, and fresh tomatoes and simmer on low heat for 1 hour, stirring frequently.

Add beans, zucchini and squash and cook for 20 more minutes. Season with salt and pepper and serve.

Nutritional analysis per serving: calories 396, protein 43g, fat 12g, percent calories from fat 27%, cholesterol 94mg, carbohydrates 34g, fiber 10g, sodium 400mg

Matbucha (Cooked Red Pepper and Tomato Salad)

Makes 2 servings

Each serving equals two 5 A Day servings

Source: foodreference.org

Energy Density = 0.63

2 red peppers
2 soft cooking tomatoes
2 Tbsp oil
1 Tbsp sweet paprika
3 tsp crushed garlic
1/4 tsp salt
3 small dried chili peppers
1 cup cooked white rice

Place peppers on an open flame. Turn the peppers until they become blackened and are burned on all sides. Place peppers in a plastic bag and let cool.

Place tomatoes in a deep bowl and pour boiling water over them. After a few minutes remove tomatoes from water and peel them. Cut tomatoes in half and squeeze out the juice (which you can save for pasta sauce or discard). Chop the tomatoes into large pieces. Place oil and chopped tomatoes in a large pot.

Place blackened peppers under running water and peel them. Cut the peppers into thin strips. Add peppers to the pot with the tomatoes. Add the spices and chopped garlic. Cook on high heat until the mixture begins to stick to the pot. Reduce the heat and cook for about half an hour until hardly any liquid is left in the pot. Serve over rice.

Nutritional analysis per serving: calories 248, protein 6g, fat 9g, percent calories from fat 29%, cholesterol 0mg, carbohydrates 41g, fiber 3g, sodium 307mg

Cherry Pepper Salad

Makes 4 servings

Each serving equals three 5 A Day servings

Source: foodreference.org

Energy Density = 0.50

1 1/4 cup fresh sweet cherries, pitted
1 cup each thinly sliced sweet yellow and green peppers
1/4 cup thinly sliced mild chili pepper
2 Tbsp finely chopped onion
2 Tbsp white wine vinegar
1/2 Tbsp olive oil
2 tsp sugar
salt and pepper to taste
1 Tbsp pickled ginger strips, optional
4 cups mixed greens

Toss together all ingredients except greens; refrigerate 1 hour or longer.
Serve on mixed greens.

Nutritional analysis per serving: calories 80, protein 2g, fat 2g, percent calories from fat 23%, cholesterol 0mg, carbohydrates 15g, fiber 3g, sodium 100mg